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# NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **STILLWATER PRISON ESCAPE TUNNEL INVESTIGATION COMPLETE**

The Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC) has completed a comprehensive investigation of a thwarted escape attempt discovered February 6, 2008, at the Minnesota Correctional Facility (MCF)-Stillwater. The investigation was conducted by the DOC's Office of Special Investigations (OSI) with assistance from the Washington County Sheriff's Office, the Washington County Attorney's Office, the St. Paul Police Department, and the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension.

Corrections Commissioner Joan Fabian praised law enforcement, OSI investigators, and other department staff for their work in discovering and investigating the foiled escape attempt. "A complete and thorough investigation was necessary to gather the facts and identify those responsible," said Commissioner Fabian. "Department operations have also been reviewed and modified to enhance security responses to increasingly sophisticated attempts by offenders to escape custody."

The investigation determined that four inmates, working in a basement area of the facility's industry program, excavated a tunnel at the base of an abandoned cargo elevator shaft – one of two in the basement area. The offenders cut an access opening through the secured shaft door and then concealed the opening with a vent cover. Once inside the shaft, the offenders burrowed with improvised tools and a hammer drill taken from the industry tool inventory. The offenders accessed an electrical source to provide power for the drill and lighting for the excavation. One offender served as a lookout and cut the power when staff or other inmate workers approached the area. The dirt was disposed of in the second unused elevator shaft.

The tunnel was discovered by a corrections officer conducting a security inspection. It was approximately 25 feet in length from its starting point under the elevator, ending a significant distance from the facility's secure perimeter wall. The tunnel was filled in after the area was released as a crime scene in March. The investigation did not conclusively determine how long the excavation had been underway due to a lack of cooperation from the offenders. However, two or more of the four involved offenders were assigned to the work area from June 2007 until February 2008.

As a result of the investigation, four inmates have pled guilty through the DOC's discipline process for aiding, advising, counseling, conspiring, attempting, or acting as an accessory to escape. They each received 540 days of punitive segregation time. The offenders are:

David Arthur Spaeth, OID 132508  
Murder 1, Life Sentence  
Hennepin County, Admitted 4/95

Craig Michael Friend, OID 163417  
Murder 1, Life Sentence  
St. Louis County, Admitted 9/91

Andrew Lechuga Salinas, OID 150723  
Murder 1, Life Sentence  
Dodge County, Admitted 1/89

Gonzalo Hernandez, OID 206389  
Murder 2, Sentence Expiration 9/7/39  
Steele County, Admitted 1/01

No department staff or individuals outside the prison system were found to be complicit in the escape attempt. However, one staff person was suspended for five days without pay for violating the department's tool control policy. Specifically, the staff person failed to verify the presence of a hammer drill in the tool inventory by direct observation of the tool. Instead, his verification was based on observation of the tool's storage case.

There has not been an escape from within the secure perimeter of the MCF-Stillwater since 1988 when an inmate scaled the wall but was apprehended within a block of the facility. Stillwater is a level 4, close-custody facility with a population of 1,460.

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Photos attached:

#1-4 Inmate photos

#5 – DOC staff at entrance to tunnel inside elevator shaft

#6 – Opening to tunnel

#7 – Front of elevator shaft

Inmate David Spaeth



Inmate Craig Friend



Inmate Andrew Salinas



Inmate Gonzalo Hernandez



Photo #5: DOC staff at entrance to tunnel inside elevator shaft



Photo #6: Tunnel was approximately 3' x 3'.



Photo #7: Front of elevator shaft where inmates cut an access opening. Industrial shelving units were located in front of the out-of-use elevator doors, further concealing the opening.

